

Truck & Tröll

On the north end of Votsboro and around the shores of Lake Skogi lies the community of Little Iceland (even littler than the real thing). At the gates, a massive pedestal of cement bears a plaque that reads, “TRÖLLIÐ VOTSBOROS” (THE TROLL OF VOTSBORO). Every day, the pedestal serves as the stage for a grotesque sculpture.

The stone figure measures almost twenty feet from head to toe, but it only stands seventeen feet tall because of its hunched back. A thick, overarching brow casts shadows over its sunken eyes. Sunrays, snow, and rain beat upon its barren scalp. A jagged stalactite of a goatee drips from its chin. The creature possesses two holes in the sides of its scalp where the ears should be. An enormous gut hangs over the waist of its loincloth, covering its rope belt. Webs of veins spread across its arms, and its knuckles literally drag against the ground at its sides. Stocky legs tipped with claws—like the hind legs of an overgrown crocodile—support the creature’s frame. A giant chameleon tail curls into a spiral behind its lower back. Everyone who enters the gates comes under the tröll’s dead-eyed stare.



Sandy and AJ divided their attention between the full moon and one another. They sat in AJ’s pickup, which he had parked near the edge of a scenic ravine.

“Humboldt U?” Sandy suggested.

“Nah,” said AJ. “Too expensive. My best bet is Olsen College in Cusp City. Didn’t you think about applying there?”

“Oh, I applied as soon as I could!” beamed Sandy. “I’ve already been accepted.”

“In *that* case, I *gotta* get accepted now!” Sandy laughed, but the buzzing of her phone interrupted her amusement.

“Who’s that?” asked AJ. The girl gave no answer. “It’s Raymond, isn’t it?”

“Yes. Ray has some . . . issues with letting go.”

“*How* long has it been since y’all been together? Four months? Half a year?”

“He still thinks of it as a recent event,” said Sandy.

“Is he going to Olsen too?” She shook her head.

“He’s not going to college. He’s joining his dad’s lumber company. I’ll . . . I’ll give him one more warning before blocking his number, OK?”

“Good,” AJ answered. “When you get him blocked, and we go off to Olsen together, he won’t be able to bother us no more.”

The couple sat in silence for a few minutes. Sandy played with her strands of prematurely gray hair. AJ stared at the birthmark on the back of his hand.

“I mean, I feel sorry for him, but that’s all. If I still had other feelings for him, we never would’ve—”

“Hold up!”

“Ray and I are done! I promise!”

“I’m not disagreein’ with you,” AJ replied. “I’m tryin’ a’ listen.”

“To what?”

They fell silent again, but a chorus of loose, rumbling stones filled the dead air. Looking down the gravel road that they had used to reach the ravine, Sandy and AJ noticed a square silhouette coming toward them. The rumbling grew into the growl of a diesel engine. In the gaps

between the trees, glimpses of an oncoming semitruck flashed in and out of view, a hulking bundle of logs strapped to its trailer. AJ swore. His hands furiously burrowed into his pockets.

“You *lost* them?” Sandy shrieked.

He met her gaze with a split-second of sheer panic before lunging into the backseat. The semitruck accelerated, on course to T-bone the pair into the ravine. AJ felt the floor behind the driver’s seat until his fingers grasped his letterman jacket. He slipped his hand into the jacket’s pocket and grabbed his keys.

Out of the corner of her eye, Sandy saw another silhouette barreling through the forest. She gasped as the newcomer’s form sprouted apelike arms. In an explosive burst, the creature leapt sideways, so that he faced the truck head-on. The driver threw himself from the vehicle, rolled to the side of the road, bolted to his feet, and sprinted into the woods with an adrenaline-fueled zeal.

At the moment of collision, the tröll wrapped his arms around the semitruck’s undercarriage. The hood crumpled against his gut. The windows imploded. The trailer jackknifed, but he broke its momentum with the scourge of his tail. He jumped with one foot and left the other foot planted, tilting his body and the truck’s cab onto their sides. Without hesitation, the creature disentangled himself from the wreckage.

Sandy and AJ watched as the tröll gradually rose from the gravel. He released the trailer’s cargo straps. Logs cascaded to the ground. He raised one of the logs to his mouth, biting it in half. The wood became saliva-soaked paper-mâché between his teeth. Then he noticed the two humans in the pickup. He regarded them stoically for a minute; then he lumbered away (so to speak) with his splintery bounty in tow.

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